

## Studies Towards a History of Bishop Bonner's Cottages, Dereham. Part 1. The painting of the plasterwork pargeting c1860 to 2020.

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This time-line summarises the written and visual evidence for the use of paint on the decorative plasterwork of the cottages from the 1860s to the present day. It has been compiled to help with the restoration of the pargeting in 2021, supplementing the report written on the pargeting by Anna Kettle dated 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020. More detailed historical information and photographs of the plasterwork are available from the author on request and will be deposited in the Dereham Heritage Trust archive. The images used are owned by the author unless credited otherwise.

### 1860s - 1870s



Fig 1. The first known image of the cottages is a photograph by W. Brunton, it is dated from the style of the women's clothes to between 1860 and 1875. There is no sign of painting on the front of the cottage only shadows cast by the form of the plasterwork.



Fig 2. Painted date of 1502

However the date of 1502 in the plasterwork on the south gable does appear to be picked out in paint see Fig 2.

The first visual evidence corresponds with the first known written description of the plasterwork by Walter Rye in his 'Tourists guide to Norfolk' 1879.

Near the ch. are "Paternoster Row" and "St. Withberga's Lane." Note, in the latter, an old-dated cottage, "MDII," with elaborate courses of handsome ornaments under the eaves, though now lime washed.

### 1880's - 1890s

The first visual records in colour are two paintings dating to this time and a postcard. Both paintings and postcard show no sign of colour on the plasterwork on the front of the cottages, but the painting by Bale shows the date on the south gable picked out in a dark paint.



Fig 3. Watercolour by Major J. E. Bale A.R.I.B.A c1890 owned by DHT



Fig 4. Oil painting by John U. Martin dated on the back of frame 1894, from the collection of the Martin family.





Fig 5. 1897 - The first known postcard showing the cottages, this copy has a written note on the back dated 1897.

#### **c1900 pre restoration of 1904 - 6**

Two postcards show the plasterwork just prior to the restoration of the cottages by Walter Rye, no trace of painting is visible. There is no difference in the tones between the pargeting and the surface it sits on, just the shadows created by the form of the plaster.



Fig 6. Postcard posted in 1903



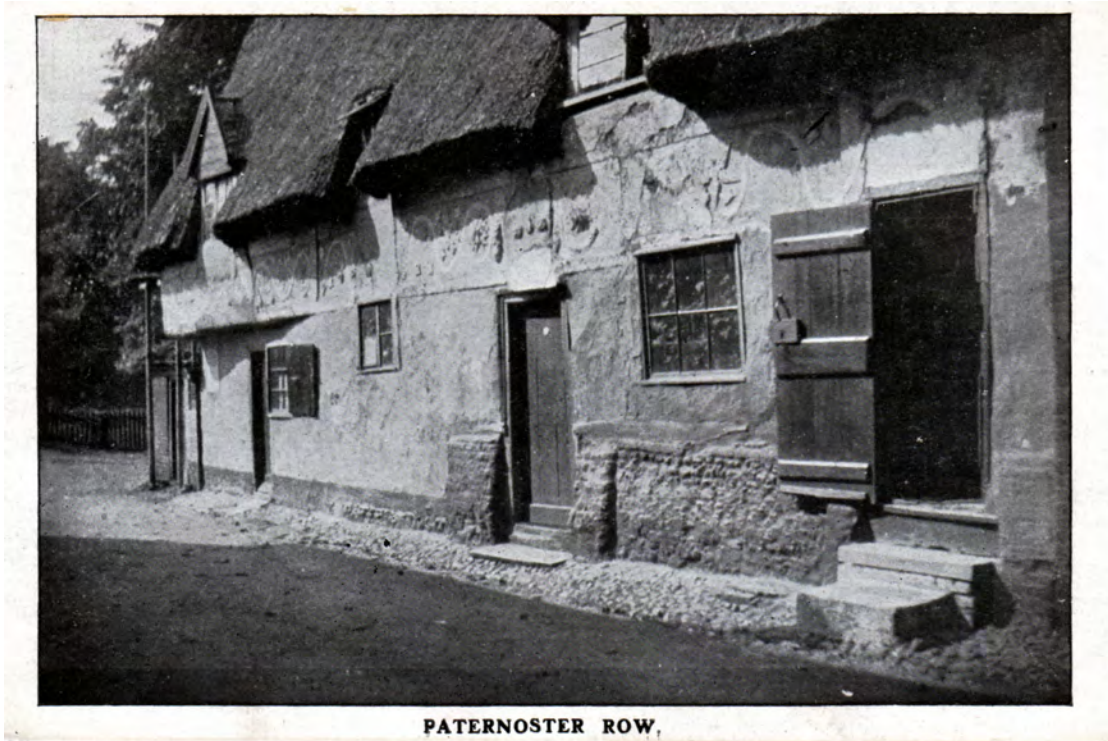


Fig 7. Photograph taken before restoration of 1904-5, date unknown, which shows no tonal difference on the plasterwork, indicating that it was not painted.

#### 1904-6 The restoration

Walter Rye who was the first to write about the cottage's plasterwork in 1879 bought the cottages in 1904 and had them restored by William Argent. In 1906 Argent published an illustrated article about his work on the cottages in 'The Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany' Part 1, edited by Water Rye. The photographs in the article are the first to show paint applied to the decorative plasterwork. The 1904-5 restoration included the rebuilding of missing elements of the pargeting before it was painted.



Fig 8. One of the photographs published in the article by Argent in 1906 showing paint on the pargeting for the first time.

The different tones of grey showing on the main panels of decorative plasterwork in Fig 8 indicate that it was painted with at least two tones of paint. The stronger tones of the three coloured fresco band described in the text can clearly be seen on the photograph, cut by the two windows. The flat wall below the fresco band appears to be a slightly darker tone than the background of the pargeting above it.

Sadly the text of the 1906 article does not describe the colours they used on the decorative panels. The only two mentions of coloured paint in the article are as follows :-

'Before leaving this old and historic edifice there are one or two more items worthy of mention, namely, the fresco painting or colouring - '.

'The fresco which is in three colours runs along the whole length of the building as was customary to the finishing of this class of work in those days.'

This seems to indicate that the only existing colour they found was the three colour painting that Argent referred to as 'the fresco', see Fig 8 above. If they had discovered traces of other paint it would be reasonable to assume they would have mentioned it.

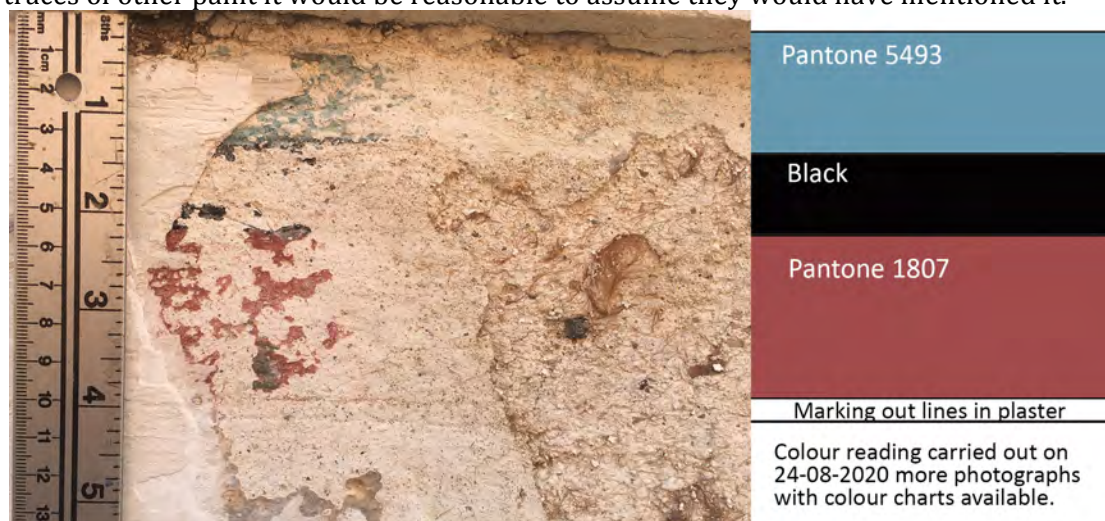


Fig 9. Traces of the three paint colours used for the fresco band with two inscribed parallel marking-out lines recorded by the author in 2020. It is hard to tell without paint analysis whether this paint pre dates 1904-5 or is from the restoration repainting.



Fig 10. Photo of c1910-15 by Herbert Cave showing the decorative plasterwork painted in a single mid-tone, possibly the green mentioned in the 1949 article, see Fig 12.



### 1930s and 1940s

Walter Rye died in 1929 and after the two World Wars the cottages had fallen into a bad state of repair. From some of the photographs of the 1930s and 40s it looks as if the walls had been given a coat of tar at one stage. An article called 'An Interesting Survivor' was published about the cottages in *The Norfolk Magazine* Vol 2 No. 4 - July-August 1949. It describes the painting of plasterwork on the cottages as follows 'The colourings are green and black on an off-white ground'.



Fig 11. A photograph taken by George Plunkett in 1948 showing the green and black paint on the plasterwork with the fresco band just visible. This is the last photograph that faintly shows the fresco band, after this it was lime washed over.



Fig 12. Remnants of this green pigment can be found along the full length of the decorative plasterwork, and under the layers of lime-wash from the early 1950s onward that covered over the area of the fresco band. It is possibly the single mid-tone colour paint shown in Fig 10 and described in the 1949 article. The black paint could have been painted over it to add contrast to certain areas.



## 1950s

Under the ownership of the Norfolk Archaeological Trust the decorative plasterwork and cottage walls were repainted with a continuation of the green and black painting scheme in the early 1950s and the fresco band was lime-washed over. In the September 1st, 1954 edition of the Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News it describes the pargeting on the cottages as ‘coloured faded peacock-green and black’.



Fig 13. Cottages after 1949 but before re-thatch of cottages summer 1954



Fig 14. This colour slide was taken after the cottages were re-thatched in 1954 but before the repainting in 1963. Photograph by Fraser Pettigrew.



Fig 15. c1960 Only two different tones probably still the green and black scheme.

### 1963

The cottages were repainted for the opening of the southern cottage as a museum in 1963. In a quote from a local newspaper article in 1978 Mrs Milly Cook states “When we took on the museum around 1963, the pargetting was just green and white,” she then explained “ But we scraped away and found it was multicoloured. But they did not have today’s bright paints in medieval days”. Analysis of the surviving paint layers would be needed to try to establish the date of what that was uncovered in 1963, as it may have just been the painting from the 1905 restoration shown in Fig 8. The 1904-5 restoration included the rebuilding of missing elements of the pargetting before it was painted.

The new paint scheme used multiple colours based closely on the colours they uncovered during the preparation for the work. Sadly no colour photographs have been found to date to show the colours used but it can be seen from the wider range of grey tones shown in black and white photographs Fig 16 and 17. A comparison between Fig 8 and Fig 16 indicates that a much stronger colour palette was used in 1963 than that which was used in 1904-5, which suggests they used stronger pigments.



Fig 16. 1963 photograph by George Plunkett





Fig 17. 1963 photograph by George Plunkett



Fig 18. The cover of the East Anglian Magazine, March 1977.

Some of the colours used in the 1963 painting scheme could be the same as those seen in the photograph from 1977 Fig 18. But there are small differences which mean it had at least been retouched since 1963 and new colours added. The red roses have had a white centre added to them to turn them into the heraldic Tudor rose. The Tudor rose consists of five white inner petals, representing the House of York, and five red outer petals to represent the House of Lancaster. The main stem was painted in a lime green, the leaves a blue green, grapes a dark purple, flowers and fruit in yellow and bright orange.

### 1977- 8

As part of the 'Bell Tower and Garden Project 1977-1979' extensive work to the cottage and surrounding area was undertaken and was supervised by Dereham Rotary Club, this involved the repainting of the cottage pargeting. The repainting of the cottages was carried out by Brock Builders of Dereham in 1977-8, the colour matching for the repainting was done by Mr Barrie Bennett. The repainting does closely follow the colour scheme of the 1963 paintwork see Fig 19.





Fig 19. Photograph from the Bell Tower and Garden Project 1977-1979 leaflet showing the newly painted pargeting on the cottages.

### 1980s to 2020

The ownership of the cottages passed from the Norfolk Archaeological Trust to the Town Council in 1981. There is a gap in the record but at some point before 1993-4 the pargeting on the cottage was repainted and the colour scheme changed. The main stem of the foliage that had been painted a lime green was then changed to a mid brown and the Tudor roses that had been the traditional red and white with a yellow centre in 1963, and 1978 were changed to blue and white with a yellow centre. This colour scheme remained unchanged until the paint was removed in the summer of 2020.



Fig 20. Photograph taken during the repairs to the cottages in 1993-4, the Tudor roses (left side panel at the bottom) are now painted blue and white.





Fig 21. Photograph from 2001.



Fig 22. Photograph from 2002



Fig 23. Photograph from 2009



Fig 24. Photograph from 2009



The paint stripping carried out in August 2020 revealed traces of the wide range of colours used to paint the pargeting over the past 115 years. The Dereham Heritage Trust requested that the author made a photographic record of the full length of the partly stripped plasterwork before a protective coat of lime-wash was applied. It is to be hoped that a full photographic record was commissioned by the Historic Building Surveyor, employed by Dereham Town Council, before work started to strip the paint and elements of the plaster were removed.



Fig 25. August 2020 The paint stripping revealed the yellow green stem from the 1963 – 1978 colour scheme and the black paint described in 1949.



Fig 26 One of swag-tails (left) and one of the Tudor roses (right), the multiple layers of paint reflect the changing fashions and paint technology over the last 115 years.



## Summary

### **Before 1904-5** Figs 1 - 7

There are no visual or written references that the pargeting on Bishop Bonner's Cottages was coloured before the restoration of 1904-5. The earliest description from 1879 stated it was lime washed. All the paintings and photographs up to 1904 show no colour or tonal contrast between the decorative plasterwork and the background.

### **After 1905** Figs 8 - 9

The first visual record of paint being applied to the pargeting on the cottages is to be found in photographs published in 1906. The photographs of 1906 show a tonal contrast between the background and the decorative plasterwork as well as the fresco band. The paint colours used on the main panels appear to be light in tone, but the tone is varied which would suggest the use of more than one colour was used.

### **1910-15** Fig 10

The next photograph of the cottages c1910-15 shows a uniform mid tone of paint on the decorative plasterwork and the doors and windows, but the three tone painted fresco strip remains. Traces of a mid tone green paint have been found on both door surrounds and plaster along the length of the cottages Fig 12.

### **1930s -1940s** Figs 11-12

Photographs from this time shows the cottages in a bad state of repair and it looks as if the cottages went many years without any painting at all. An article published in 1949 states the decorative plasterwork was painted green and black on an off white background.

### **1954 - 1962** Figs 13 - 15

The cottages had major work done to the northern end of the roof in 1954 and it looks from photographs at the time that the cottages were also repainted. In 1954 the colour scheme was still limited to a faded peacock-green and black see Fig 14. When the Dereham Antiquarian Society took on the southern cottage to open as a museum in 1962, the pargeting was painted green and white.

### **1963** Figs 16-18

While scraping down the pargeting for repainting volunteers from Dereham Antiquarian Society discovered earlier multicoloured painting. This was possibly the painting from the restoration of 1904-5. The colours for the new scheme were based closely on those they uncovered. Photographs of the museum opened in 1963 show a lot of contrast between the painting of the plasterwork and the background.

### **1978** Fig 19

The repainting of the plasterwork in 1978 was colour matched to follow the colour scheme of 1963.

### **1980 -2020** Figs 20 - 26

There is a gap in the record but at some point before 1993-4 the pargeting was repainted and broke away from the colour scheme established in 1963. The Tudor roses were changed from the traditional red and white to blue and white and other colour changes were made. That colour scheme remained unchanged until August 2020.

### **The Future**

The author's view is to restore the pargeting back to first class condition and then lime-wash with no colour as it would originally have been: see Anna Kettle's report. This would save it from the use of inappropriate colours or paint types in the future and will simplify its care in the future.